

Why You Need a Mentor

Don't be intimidated to ask for help. There are many successful entrepreneurs happy to show you the ropes.

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By Brian O'Rourke

Q: How do I find a mentor?

A: One of the keys to becoming a successful entrepreneur is having someone to motivate and inspire you. If you talk to any successful entrepreneur, you will most likely find that she had one or more people in her life that either officially or unofficially guided her through the good and bad times in her career.

Often times, teens simply do not know how to approach a mentor. They are intimidated by asking an adult to work with them. More often than not, though, entrepreneurs will be more than happy to meet with you. They are flattered that you'd like to learn from them.

When seeking out a mentor, it's usually best to find one within your chosen industry. This way, the mentor will be able to give you a heads-up on the specific obstacles you'll encounter along the way. He or she can then offer you practical advice on how to deal with issues when they come up. Your mentor will serve as an unofficial board member for your business. However, while it's best to find a mentor within your chosen industry, you should never choose one that has a similar geographic area as your intended business. You wouldn't want to compete with your own mentor, after all.

There are several formal programs nationwide that link young people with mentors. There should be one or more available in your community. Ask your school guidance counselor or teachers if they know of any business mentoring programs you can join. Otherwise, look for someone in the family or in the phonebook who runs a business like the one you'd like to start.

When you find a potential mentor, approach him in an inquisitive way. Ask how he started his business, what education or knowledge he had to acquire, and if he had a mentor himself. Find out the good and bad things about his business. That way, you'll have a realistic outlook.

If your mentor is currently running a business, then he'll understandably be very busy. Therefore, you cannot expect him to be available every single time you have a question. You may want to set up a scheduled meeting time and meet once each week or each month. You can go out to lunch together or meet at your mentor's office. That's up to you and your mentor.

It doesn't have to be a very formal arrangement. But having a mentor who's been through the trials and triumphs of entrepreneurship is one of the most valuable assets you can have.

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